

[“Strategy: Building Community” begins below]

**Strategy: Building Community**

*Our neighborhoods have experienced changes over the past few decades which affect our sense of belonging and connection. People need places where they can go to interact with other members of their community. Places where they feel familiar, comfortable, and safe. Parks, and particularly recreation centers, play a vital role in bringing neighborhoods together. To ensure that parks continue to contribute positively to our community, their role must be expanded and strengthened and barriers to participation must be overcome. Parks and recreation centers must be safe, and equally important, people must be able to get to parks safely. Increased efforts are needed to expand outreach, awareness, and understanding of people with different cultural backgrounds, and people of all age groups. Building on a strong tradition of citizen participation, continuing opportunities must be provided to foster effective citizen involvement in park operations, development and maintenance.*

**Findings:**

1. Several trends characterize Saint Paul's population, which in turn, have an impact on the delivery of park and recreation services. These include:
  - a. Saint Paul's population is becoming more diverse - racially and ethnically. Between 1980 and 2000, the City's minority population increased by almost 80 percent; increasing from 10 percent in 1980 to 18 percent in 1990. The largest increase occurred in the Asian population whose share increased by 6.1 percent. In addition, 58 percent of school aged children currently in the city are non-white.
  - b. While the senior population has remained fairly constant for the past several decades, the number of 30-39 year olds is at the highest level since 1940. As a result, our senior population will likely increase over the next 30 to 40 years.
  - c. While the current adolescent population (10-19) is at a 90 year low, the number of children under 10 has increased and will likely lead to a larger teenage population in the next decade.
  - d. The average household size in Saint Paul continues to decrease. The number of non-family households (single individuals or non-related persons living together) make up 43 percent of all households. In addition, 29 percent of all households with children are headed by a single woman.
2. Changing demographics and other social and economic factors have resulted in an increase in demand for social service oriented programs at recreation centers.
3. The Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Commission's 1992 report *A Strategy for Neighborhoods in Transition* concludes that recreation centers should play a vital role in neighborhood stabilization and community building efforts.

4. The City continues to classify its 42 recreation centers according to the three-tier system of: community recreation centers, neighborhood recreation centers, and part-time recreation centers. However, alternative staffing models are being explored, such as the "neighborhood service delivery team", which would better match available recreation center staff and community education staff to differing community needs and program size.
5. Awareness and concern about crime in the city has increased. Particularly troubling is the increased involvement of youth and the increasing randomness of crime. While these trends present a challenge to the entire city, they present a specific need for secure and safe parks and access to park facilities.
6. Perceptions of crime and fear of crime affect decisions people make about whether to use park facilities and how to get to parks safely.
7. The majority of problems in Saint Paul parks involve drinking, vandalism, vehicle break-ins, and loitering. The number of reported crime incidents in parks has increased over the past few years, in part due to improved reporting and record keeping.



**Mississippi River Boulevard Park**

***Objective 7: Encourage enforcement and operational efforts which promote safe and secure access to and use of parks.***

Increasing crime rates present a challenge to the entire city, including its parks. While Saint Paul parks remain relatively safe, the number of reported crime incidents has increased over the past few years. These trends have an impact on users perceived degree of safety and therefore the use of park facilities. It is also important to recognize that safety concerns extend beyond park boundaries and need to be addressed within the context of the surrounding neighborhood.

**Policies:**

28. Provide adequate staffing of park facilities to maximize safety and security.
29. Provide continuing support for park security programs and safety responsiveness and awareness programs.
30. Foster effective communication and coordination between Division staff, park security, police officers, and neighborhood groups to improve awareness and responsiveness to park and neighborhood safety and security issues.

***Objective 8: Provide recreation facilities and programming that contributes to stable neighborhoods.***

Concern about accelerated change and instability within Saint Paul's neighborhoods inspired the Park and Recreation Commission's study *A Strategy for Neighborhoods in Transition*. One conclusion of that study was that recreation centers are the only public, neighborhood-based service providers readily accessible, and belonging to all members of the community. By strengthening and expanding the traditional role of recreation centers, particularly at the identified *Neighborhoods in Transition* centers, they will become neighborhood focal points and key components of the neighborhood network.



***Merriam Park Skate Park***

**Policies:**

31. Provide recreation programming that helps build a sense of community through:
  - a. Responsiveness to the diverse needs and desires of residents;
  - b. Enhancement and celebration of neighborhood identity;
  - c. Improved outreach to all residents, including those not currently using recreation services;
  - d. Keeping recreation centers open 7 days a week as need and available resources permit.
32. Consider providing facilities or programming for alternative, emerging recreation trends, particularly those that meet the recreational needs of youth.
33. Support use of recreation centers to host functions and events sponsored by community organizations, service providers and neighborhood residents.
34. Encourage cooperative facility arrangements and joint use agreements with other service providers that contribute to improved service and access for the public.



### ***Objective 9: Identify and remove barriers to participation.***

There are many types of barriers that discourage residents from using park services and facilities.

**Physical barriers** such as busy streets, the river, rail road tracks, and stairs can hinder access to park facilities. **Social barriers** such as racial or age prejudice, language differences, and insensitivity toward people with disabilities may result in certain groups of people being excluded from use of some park services, or being unaware of services offered. **Economic barriers** such as fees or equipment charges may result in participation costs that are too high for some members of our community. Program limitations and time constraints may also present barriers to participation. Overcoming these barriers is necessary to ensure park and recreation opportunities are available to all segments of our population.

#### **Policies:**

35. Provide for timely implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
36. Maintain public access to parks and recreation facilities, services, and programs through:
  - a. Establishment of a fee policy and review process that ensures fees and equipment charges do not create barriers to participation;
  - b. Encourage the MCTO and other transit providers to improve coordination, convenience, and affordability of transit access to parks and recreation programs and facilities;
  - c. Work with Public Works, the Police, district councils, schools and others to identify and promote "safe routes" to park facilities (see Objective 3, policy 8);
  - d. Provide directional signage for parks.
37. Provide for safe accommodation of pedestrians and bicyclists on all bridges.
38. Ensure development adjacent to parks does not in any way create a barrier to public access, use, or enjoyment of a park facility.
39. Ensure staff are prepared to work with a diverse public through:
  - a. Recruitment and training of staff and volunteers who are sensitive to the city's park users, including ethnic and language barriers;
  - b. Recruitment and retention of people of color for staff and volunteer positions.
40. Improve outreach efforts by fostering:
  - a. Strategic targeting of promotional efforts;
  - b. Continuous, on-going public information programs;
  - c. Effective joint promotional efforts; and
  - d. Effective distribution of public information materials.
41. Provide recreation programs and services at times convenient to the community.





*Rice Recreation Center Play Area*

***Objective 10: Foster opportunities for on-going community and citizen involvement and feedback.***

Involving citizens in decisions regarding park planning, development, operations, and maintenance gives them a sense of ownership, responsibility, and control. Residents play an important role in helping staff identify park and recreation needs specific to their neighborhood. In 1990 the City took a significant step in providing a forum for citizen involvement in the planning, management, operations, and development of the park and recreation system by establishing the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Commission. Continuing support for citizen participation must be provided to ensure that involvement is meaningful and effective and has a clear impact on the quality of park and recreation services.

**Policies:**

42. Involve all constituents (residents, park users, interest groups) in setting balanced priorities for planning, development, programming, maintenance, use of facilities, physical enhancement or development of facilities and/or open spaces, and other park related matters.

***Objective 11: Promote cultural awareness***

St. Paul possesses a rich cultural heritage and broad spectrum of arts, historical, and ethnic resources. These resources include the park system itself, and its historic structures and features. Parks can enhance awareness and access to these resources through cultural events and interpretive programs. It is also important to recognize that while increased ethnic and racial diversity has added to the richness of Saint Paul it also presents new challenges. Language barriers, cultural ignorance and insensitivity can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and--in the worst case--exclusion and alienation. Increasing cultural sensitivity can help eliminate cultural barriers while allowing us to draw upon the benefits and rewards of our diverse culture.

**Policies:**

43. Expand cross-cultural programming and interpretive opportunities.
44. Provide programs that are familiar and attractive to under-served populations.
45. Pro-actively recruit and retain people of color and bilingual people for staff and volunteer positions. (see Objective 9, policy 39).
46. Encourage use of park facilities to host public cultural and historic events.



*Winter Carnival Ice Sculptures*